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NATIONAL CHARACTER AND CLASSICISM IN  
ITALIAN ETHICS.

IN the first part of this article \* we tried, through a review of the history of philosophy, to bring out into clearness those doctrines which, having their origin in Italy, seemed to us to correspond to a scientific consciousness of the most marked characteristics of the Italian mind on the side of its intellectual development. We pointed out the splendid initiatives furnished by our philosophers in the Middle Ages, and especially at the time of the Renaissance, the influence exerted by them on the development of philosophy in other nations, and, finally, the want of originality on the part of the speculative thinkers of Italy in modern times. While recognizing that no tendency of thought has ever been altogether lacking in Italy, but, on the contrary, that all are to be found, now scattered among the different thinkers of the country, now admirably condensed in those of them that best represent the genius of the people, we called special attention to the fascination exerted on our minds by the sensible beauty of the world, and to the strong general inclination to enjoy and represent it; and we saw that this resulted in a tendency to prefer the external, active life to the internal meditative one, and to follow the practical instinct in its various manifestations, artistic and poetic, scientific and civil,—a fact which accounts for the relative deficiency of the effort necessary for the profound study of the thinking subject, its functions and laws, and hence, in the main, for the want of broad, original views in philosophy. Thus, as we saw, it has come to pass that the Italian mind, firmly bound to the objective world, seems to have approached metaphysical speculation only to bridle it with a sense of measure which recalls in part the artistic tendency, and in part the constant adherence of the Italians to

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\* "National Character and Classicism in Italian Philosophy." October number, 1894, vol. v. p. 63.

classical traditions, with this difference, however, that our nature, standing related, as it does, in origin, to both the Greek and Roman races, has not inherited, in equal degree, either the faculty for ideal syntheses which belonged to the former, or the power of political organization which characterized the latter.

It is impossible that these traits of the Italian intellect should be extraneous to the doctrines or views in which, to a certain degree, its ethical consciousness is mirrored. At the same time, we shall find that they do not all reappear, with equal force, in that part of this article in which we purpose to point out rapidly those of them which in our moral and political writers correspond to dominant concepts respecting the principles of practical life.

## I.

In his discourse on the Moral Sense of the Italians, Mamiani remarks that in the Latin, and especially in the Italian races, the subjective life, if lacking a certain depth and continuity, finds, nevertheless, a compensation for this in an æsthetic idealism, under whose forms the feeling of the Good awakes and unfolds, and that this identification of the Beautiful with the Good, which to the Greeks seemed so intimate and natural that they called them both by the same name, manifests itself to the multitude in Italy by a direct intuition; and, after calling attention to the fact that, being more fond of celebrations and festivals than other peoples, we generally prefer those forms of civil and religious life which, like our sky, are full of gladness and splendor, he calls to mind the height to which our ancestors, following in the steps of Plato, carried the conception of love, in the deification of the gentler sex, and goes on to reprove the Italians for their tendency to selfishness, envy, and discord, telling them that the only way to lift them out of that quagmire is to hold up before them an object lofty, generous, memorable,—in a word, something ideal and poetical.

We believe that the history of moral ideas in Italy affords a confirmation of this judgment, though not without certain

reservations. This history reveals to us a kind of moral reflection, which, without being at variance with the tendencies of life formulated in the doctrines of Hedonism, Egoism, and Social Utility, is most usually guided by the ideas of perfection, of beauty, of divine happiness or blessedness,—in a word, by an ethical idealism in which the æsthetic principle is superimposed upon the absolute good and upon duty.

This tendency, which, within certain limits, subordinates morals to æsthetics and to eudæmonism, and conforms to the instincts of our race, does not, for all that, owe its origin to Italy, but has passed from Greek philosophy into our thought through the medium of classical tradition. It is needless to call to mind that the influence of this classical tradition in our philosophy begins with its history; it appears at the very beginning of the Middle Ages in Boëtius and Cassiodorus, and passes from their writings into those of leading philosophical thinkers, all the way down to Dante and Petrarch, reviving in fresh form in the teachings of the Renaissance, and continuing without interruption down to our own day. Now, if in all this period there is any moral doctrine which has received special development in Italy, and which, from its character and psychological relations, may be called at once classical and Italian, it is that which makes the Beautiful the means of ascent to the Good. But, first of all, let us deal with what may be called a prejudicial question. Let us ask how Platonism, which, as we saw in our previous article, exerted so long and powerful an influence on Italian metaphysical systems, yielded its sceptre to Aristotelianism in the Ethics generally taught in our universities, and expounded by the greater part of our older moralists and political writers. Let us see in what manner, and to what degree, the æsthetic form of the Good, and the love of the Divine Ideal, reappear in the Ethics of Aristotle, and how far they have succeeded in sharing with Platonism its influence on Italian moralists, and contributing, through them, to bring out one and the same element of the ethical consciousness of the people.

The struggle begun by Petrarch against the Aristotelianism of the Schools, and vigorously continued by the philosophers

of the Renaissance down to Telesius and Bruno, put an end to the exclusive rule of Aristotelian metaphysics and physics, but did not discredit Aristotelian Ethics in Italy. This ethical system continued to hold sway in the schools and in books, along with the most ideal part of Platonic morals, even after the revolution which, in Galilei, Descartes, and Locke, turned philosophy in the direction of the sciences. But the opposition seems to us explicable in several ways. Neither Plato nor his principal followers ever offered a systematic exposition of morality. In the dialogues of the Master it appears in fragments, whereas Aristotle's treatise presents us with a body of doctrine methodically arranged and well adapted for instruction. In a science bearing so deeply on life, this circumstance is one of great moment. Nor is it apart from our purpose to reflect that the Ethics of Aristotle was considered by St. Thomas to be reconcilable with the Christian faith, and accepted by the Church. It is, further, noteworthy that the educational centre in which it longest maintained its hold was the University of Padua, subject to the Venetian government, the most conservative in Italy; although, on the other hand, we may observe that, in a region as exposed to change in its political regulations as was Tuscany in the Middle Ages, the Ethics of Aristotle was no less cultivated than at Padua and Bologna, and that, too, not only by men occupied with education, but also by writers participating in affairs of state. What, then, can be the reason of this spontaneous and prolonged agreement? Without excluding other influences, we believe that the principal causes must be sought in the agreement existing between the Ethics of Aristotle and that of Plato, in regard to the Divine Ideal which is their supreme principle, in the persistent effort on the part of the Italians to hold together and harmonize the two higher forms of philosophic classicism, and, finally, in their tendency to see the Good in the Beautiful, rather than to recognize it in itself and apart from Beauty.

This view readily finds confirmation as soon as we recall to mind the nature of the chief parts of the Ethics of Aristotle and their relations to the aptitudes of the Italian mind, or to the

circumstances of our civil and religious life. The idea of the contemplative life, and the corresponding felicity, which Aristotle sets up as the ultimate end of man, coincides with the bliss promised by the Church in reward for virtue, and with the rules of the monastic orders most devoted to contemplative mysticism. On the other hand, the picture which Aristotle draws of the human faculties in his ideal type of ethical life, arranging hierarchically their operations and ends, is as harmonious as a work of art, as complete as reality, as conciliative as the demands of practical life require. It is easy, therefore, to understand how historians and statisticians, like Segni, Varchi, and Paruta, found in the *Ethics* the perfect expression of the principles that ought to regulate social and political life. Aristotle's very definition of virtue as the mean between two extremes, could hardly keep falling in, better than any other, with their notions of prudence. We must not stop to enumerate all the writers who, from Brunetto Latini and Dante down to Jacopo Stellini, have for ages commented, developed, and applied the *Ethics* of Aristotle in Italy: the list would be too long. What deserves notice is the characteristic of ideality and beauty which marks its supreme principle and which it has in common with that of the *Ethics* of Plato. The methods of the two supreme philosophers are different, but their end is substantially the same,—the Divine Ideal. Plato's moral dialectic rises, indeed, to the absolute Good on the two wings of intelligence and love, while that of Aristotle rises to the same height through the action of the intellect and will. Both, nevertheless, are idealistic; both unite in principle with religion; both attain to an order of ends, which in Aristotle is determined as a number of types of practical and intellectual virtue, in Plato as a scale of objects of contemplation, a series of grades of beauty. "The *Nichomachean Ethics*" and Diotima's discourse in Plato's "*Symposium*" furnish proof of this.

Given, then, these points of resemblance between the two systems of ethics and their relation to the character of the Italian mind, we are able to understand their influence on the philosophic literature of the peninsula. This has differed

with the temper of the different minds that have cultivated them. According as these have tended more or less to the practical or the artistic, the mystical or the positive, they have cultivated the one or the other and presented us in their writings with results which must be taken as a manifestation of the national moral consciousness. But if we are to balance against each other the different weights to be attributed to these two influences, we must by no means make them out equal, or even regard them from the same stand-point. The fact is, if the Ethics of Aristotle has ruled for six centuries in our schools in connection with theology, under the high dominion of the Church of the traditional authority of the Greek philosopher, this long influence has been due, in great measure, to political and ecclesiastical power, and thus on account of these official relations does not reveal to us the spontaneity of the Italian moral consciousness, as does Plato's doctrine of love, which in no other country has had a development equal to that which appears in our moralists.

Love and the ideal have so conspicuous a place in our literature that they cannot fail to strike any one who is even but moderately acquainted with its history. Indeed, we have but to utter the names of Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, to find in this triad the roots of the twofold ramification of a literature essentially devoted to subjects of love and divided between the idealistic and realistic tendencies.

Let us pass over the host of novelists who do not belong to philosophy, and let us name merely the Christian hedonism of Valla, in order to recall the fact that, at the beginning of the philosophical Renaissance, the sensuous form of love assumed a place in scientific morals,\* and let us glance, in passing, at the names of Muratori, Genovesi, Gioja, and Romagnosi, who, making happiness the chief end of man, laid down pleasure and utility as the basis of an eudæmonistic morality,—the first two subordinating it to theology, the second two treating it independently. But, while we assert that no one

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\* See Lorenzo Valla, "De Voluptate."

of the principal forms of ethics is foreign to Italian speculation, and no one of the integrating elements of ethical life has been absent from the consciousness of our nation, let us remember that this fact does not help to bring out the points in which our ethics differs from that of other nations. What constitutes this distinction is the idealistic tendency above referred to, and especially the form which Neoplatonism has, directly or indirectly, impressed on the works of the poets, the moralists, the writers on æsthetics, and the metaphysicians, and on their relations to Italian life. Our best lyric poets exalt love in deifying woman, penetrate, with singular subtlety, into the most secret windings of the passion of love, and, not satisfied with expressing in exquisite verses the psychology of it, like Cino and Guicinielli, they elaborate the physiology of it, as Cavalcanti did; not to speak of Dante, who, with superior mind, makes it the basis of his philosophy. He places it at the apex of the universe, unifying it with God the "primal love," which "moves the sun and the other stars," like the desire and will of man (*desire* and *velle*); he infuses it, under the form of natural appetite, into the elements; he makes it the spring of virtue, as he makes its opposite the spring of vice. In a word, for Dante, love is at once a moral and æsthetic faculty and a theological and cosmological principle; but this universality was already vaguely expressed in the prophecies of Joachim of Flora, that herald to the nations of a renovation of the world under the reign of the Holy Spirit, and had manifested itself, in a wonderful way, in the consciousness and the actions of St. Francis of Assisi. A psychological study of this extraordinary man would perhaps serve to exhibit him as, more than any one else, the type of those profound relations which in the Italian mind exist between the feeling for the Good and the feeling for the Beautiful. For this divine founder of a religious order, destined to restore the Church and Christian society to the life of the gospel, has no other power whereby to succeed in his attempt than an active, boundless faith in love; a force at once human and divine, capable of the greatest sacrifices, susceptible of the most various forms, and exemplified in Christ. United



to its true object, the amorous soul, according to the rule of St. Francis, detaching itself from material goods and from desires, gains, through external poverty, internal riches, and recovers the expansive virtue which divinely drives it to seek the food of men, to live and to work for them. He makes perfect joy consist in perfect self-abnegation: in his fancy poverty becomes a poetic myth, is idolized as a lady whom he serves as a mystic knight, and to whom, as widowed for so many ages by the death of Christ, he wishes to bring back the whole of Christendom, the life of the Church. The extent of his affection is so great that only an exaggeration of the mystic tendency can account for his strange idea of fraternizing with other creatures to such an extent as to seek to free the wild beasts from their fierce instincts and convert them to harmony and universal peace. We must not forget, in this connection, to mention an important document, the "Song of the Sun." This famous hymn, written by St. Francis in praise of the creatures of God, contains the expression of the universality of love, along with an ingenious conception of cosmic finality, in which all the creatures are represented as instruments of divine love, and of its creative and providential power.

The two tendencies—the optimistic and the æsthetic—perhaps appear nowhere else so spontaneous and so well fused as in the writers who, in prose or in verse, wrote treatises on moral and religious philosophy for Italians: the pessimistic note reflected from the depths of Christianity is scattered through those writings on the wretchedness of the world and on contempt for it, which appeared in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, not excluding even that of Petrarch ("De Contemptu Mundi"). Nevertheless, set on foot by the Franciscan movement, the doctrine of love left numerous marks on the writers of these centuries. That morals have an æsthetic source is shown in Bambagioli and Fra Giordano da Rivalta, not to speak of others. In both, love is the source of the virtues; but in the second, who is more learned than the first, it is combined with philosophic thought, and, under the influence of St. Bonaventura, St.

Augustine, and the Pseudo-Dionysius, becomes identical with the principle of creation.

## II.

If we could stop long enough to determine the bonds that, in the history of Italian philosophy, unite the moral doctrine of love with metaphysics, we should find opening up before us a wide field for consideration in the study of the rise and progress of the Platonic Academy of Florence. The writings of Christopher Landini, Marsilius Ficinus, John Pico della Mirandola, Benivieni, Lorenzo de' Medici and Diacceto would furnish us with ample proofs of the influence of these doctrines on philosophic culture, on art and on religion; but since we have several times already alluded to this, in the first part of this article, in speaking of the aptitudes of the Italian mind, we shall hasten to return from the theoretical aspect of the question to the practical side, and to look, in the applications of the doctrine of love made by Italian moralists, for a confirmation of the important part it played in the life of our nation. We shall not follow it through the two poems of Francis of Barberino, who in his "*Documenti d'Amore*," and his "*Reggimento e Costumi di Donne*," presents us with a practical ideal of female virtue, sometimes going into particulars in view of age and conditions, sometimes bringing out what is common and essential. Though the one is more speculative and the other more practical, both substantially reduced the virtues to love, making the vices so many manifestations of its opposite, and, in conformity with the ethics of the time, they find in God the spring and the supreme object of love. Let us hasten to add a few remarks on the time of the Renaissance, in which the doctrine of love and beauty could not otherwise than fall in with the change of culture completely dominated by Classicism, and with the marvellous development of the arts and sciences. The truth is, we find it represented in the courts, which vied with each other in power and luxury. It reflects the enlarged sense of propriety and elegance in the manners and customs of the time, and generally the æsthetic development of forms in public and private life.

At the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth, the doctrine of love is the chosen theme of the prose writers who are most famous for the elegance of their classical imitation. Above all others, Bembo, Castiglioni, and Casa make use of it to delineate ideal types of beauty and of love, in which the thoughts of the "Phædrus" and "Symposium" of Plato, works already commented on by Ficinus and his school, reappear, now enhanced by new fragrance, now diluted by subtle and otiose distinctions. Written for the elegant society of the courts, the "Courtier" of Castiglioni and the "Asolani" of Bembo are real treatises on practical morality for the use of knights and ladies—treatises in which the substance of the Good is wonderfully clothed in the forms of the Beautiful, when it is not conspired against and betrayed. We have no intention of attributing to this revived Platonism so much influence as to make it accountable for the corrupt manners of that age; but we may certainly see in it an element which contributed to its moral weariness, as well as a tendency to exaggerate the æsthetic form at the expense of the Good. This excessive classicism could not fail to bear fruit, and the dread with which it inspired Savonarola and his followers were not unfounded. The æsthetic moralists were not all so well balanced or so wise as Casa and his "Galateo," that school of good habits and fine manners; they did not all limit themselves to following the classical authors in their search for the perfect proportions and harmony of moral and physical types, as did Alberti,\* Da Vinci, Raphael, and Michelangelo; but, separating the Beautiful from the Good, not a few of them contributed to the destruction of the balance between the æsthetic faculty and the moral sense, and to the decay and loss of liberty. All these philosophers of the Renaissance failed to evolve any serious moral psychology, and perhaps it could not be otherwise, until thought, freed from the shackles of platonic and Aristotelian commentaries, had turned back upon itself, and had

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\* See his "Governo della Famiglia," and his treatises on Painting and Sculpture.

derived from direct observation of the human mind that which it lacked, especially the true conception of the moral law and its absolute value. In spite of some hints pointed out by Spaventa in the works of Giordano Bruno, it is impossible to credit the philosopher of Nola with a clear conception of the volitional function, or its relations to obligation in the moral consciousness.\*

In a half page of his "Eroici Furori" † we find a distinct expression of the power of the will; but the power of love is the subject of the dialogue as a whole, and gives an impress of passion to his character and his life. Of the two forces that create heroism, it is not the cool, calculating, and tenacious will that leads him to martyrdom, but impetuous, boundless affection. The infinite ideal of the True inflames and transports him in an irresistible way. That "Infinitude of Love," about which, in the same century, Tullia of Aragon and Benedetto Varchi dispute in a dialogue bearing that title, ‡ is really felt by him, and allows him no rest save in death. In the works of Campanella, likewise, we meet the same fluctuations between will and love. Sometimes the two words are distinguished, while the things are confounded, as well when he treats of the "primalities" (*velle, nosse, posse*) which are unified in the divine Essence, and form the substantial basis of created things, as when he applies them to determine the idea of the City of the Sun,—an invention condemned both by experience and by reason, as are all the Utopias which from Plato's day to ours have set more value upon a fantastic type of beauty than upon the law of the will and its authority in the whole practical order.

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\* Before the Renaissance, St. Thomas and the Thomists admitted, indeed, a natural law; but, by subordinating it to the divine, revealed law, they rendered its authority relative, and dependent on the external source of theologic dogmatism.

† See "Eroici Furori," vol. ii. p. 305 (edit. Wagner); B. Spaventa, "Saggi di Critica Filosofica," p. 187 (Naples, 1867).

‡ See "Della Infinità d'Amore," Dialogo di Tullia d'Aragona. Milan, Duelli, 1864.

### III.

In the last century and the early part of this, the ethics of the Italians, like that of other nations, underwent the influence of French and English sensism; but in general, it was informed by the principles of idealism, in which we may distinguish, at least, three forms of moral philosophy,—(1) the theological, which sets out with revelation and the notion of the divine will, (2) that which has for its basis an ideal of divine perfection, and (3) that which rests on the idea of duty. Widely as the first was diffused in the national education, it belongs to the religious spirit of the Italian people, as governed by the Church, rather than to the spontaneity of its moral consciousness. It is true that the third, though admirably described and applied by our historians, did not arise in modern philosophy through our efforts, but through those of the nation which, being more inclined than those of the South to the subjective life, succeeded, through the Reformation, in emancipating its own religious consciousness, and in bringing it back, through direct study of the Gospels, to its norm and principle. With the genius of Kant the idea of duty reappeared in all its splendor. But this happy return would have been impossible without those psychological and critical studies which developed all the way from Descartes and Locke down to the philosopher of Königsberg. Then, and only then, when it was shown that the moral Imperative does not rest upon an authority external to the reason, and is not directly bound up with either instinct or affection, but with the rational faculty of willing, was it possible for Galluppi and Rosmini to subordinate the idea of happiness to that of the Absolute Good, and to distinguish the science of the one from that of the other, or for Joseph Mazzini to remind the Italian people, with the authority and consciousness of truth, that it had not only rights but duties, and that both are bound up, in the universal order, with divine justice. Then also the ideal of life, which through the imagination, determining it either rightly or illusively, according to its relations with the intellect, as the object of love, found its true office, which is to

complete morality, not to lay its foundation. Kant has demonstrated, with great clearness, that no end, however elevated or sublime, can be placed above the internal legislation, which, through universal and inviolable maxims, prescribes the ends and means of our conduct, imposes itself upon the will, and regulates love. Everything must have its place. Deprive the moral law of its rational independence, and subordinate it to a revelation, and you strip it of its universal authority, and place the criterion of morality outside the human conscience, separate entirely the law from the divine ideal, and the will from love, uproot from the human spirit the thought which elevates it above vulgar interests, and quench the flame of the great virtues and noble heroisms. Religion and æsthetics are not the lords of morality, but they are associated with it and complete it. Without them human morality differs but little from Egoism.

#### IV.

But it is time to look, in the civil history of the Italian people, for some confirmation of the reflections drawn from the history of philosophy with respect to the manifestation of its ethical tendencies. What thoughts, then, does the history of the Italian people suggest with regard to the relations between its moral life and the ideas of country and nation? what judgment has been delivered on its political and religious character? We make no claim to treat adequately this vast subject in the brief space that remains to us. We shall limit ourselves to a few observations merely.

In the first place, let us observe the great difference which exists between the historical process which has resulted in the creation of other European nationalities, and the altogether special circumstances which for so long have retarded that of Italy. Here, after the fall of the Western Empire, the conquest struck no lasting roots as it did in Gaul. This was due either to the relative weakness of the races that successively undertook it, or to the effects of a southern climate upon northern races, or, finally, to the special conditions of the conquered, who were superior to their conquerors in civilization,

and different from them in historical traditions and in religion. Too well known are the obstacles which the ambition of the popes placed in the way of the various attempts at Italian unity which were made by conquerors, princes, and nations in the course of the centuries; and no less known is the affection which the people of the peninsula preserved for the institutions, and especially for the principles, of Rome. The memory of the empire never altogether faded from their minds, and the prestige of an immense dominion, supported by the sense of the advantages which had accrued from it, naturally exerted such an influence upon them as made them ready to accept its return, even if this was brought about by foreigners, and at the same time inspired the latter with cupidity and ambition. It cannot be said that, in times gone by, the Italians were deficient in love of country; but circumstances, so to speak, broke up its object, and divided the feeling in such a way as to render the history of the peninsula full of conflicts and disasters, and almost chaotic, during the unhappiest part of the Middle Ages. The differences among Italian races and localities, being far deeper than those which distinguished the peoples of Gaul, Britain, and Germany, expressed themselves in the municipalities and municipal institutions, in which these races found the immediate and practical object of their aspirations, and which they not only persistently preserved and developed, but also defended with enthusiasm and heroic virtue. In the memorable struggle between the Communes of Lombardy and the Emperor of Germany, we seem to see, not so much a conflict between two contradictory ideas, as a battle between feelings determined by different circumstances and interests of which the sentiment of country and race is not the least important. The municipal franchises were defended against the empire, which had ceased to stand for feudalism, and had become a power protecting privileges incompatible with them: there was no intention of overthrowing the imperial authority, but only of resisting the despotism of the emperor. In any case, an ideal of classical origin shaped the new form of patriotism, and was not foreign to the long party struggles of the Ghib-

belines. The Guelphs, on the other hand, found in the papacy an authority as far superior to that of the emperor as the divine is superior to the human. The grandiose element of these ideas is, in some way, involved in the glory and in the shame of a people, which, more than any other, presents to us the sad spectacle of interminable discords and fratricidal wars, but which was also a teacher of culture and civilization through the rivalries of its republics and prince-doms. In order to realize the extent to which divisions multiplied among the Italians, we have only to call to mind those verses of Dante, in which he sets a mark of infamy upon the sanguinary strifes of those whom

“One wall encloses and one moat.”

But how could the masses escape the influence of the cosmopolitan ideal, just referred to, when even the loftiest intellects of the time were in thralldom to it? To be sure, in the writings of Petrarch, the notion of country begins to free itself from the shackles of cosmopolitanism, and to call aloud for the independence of Italy; and a time is coming when Italy will rise to a clear and distinct consciousness of herself. This great fact, the condition of her regeneration, was virtually pre-existent in her spirit, and only waited for the events which should be the efficient causes of its realization. The fact is, in treating of the character of a people, we must bear in mind that the time necessary in order to know it from its effects is measured by ages. In its development, the phases of its manifestation are necessarily very various and proportioned to the importance and complication of the collective life. If we consider only the ages which intervene between the end of the Carlovingian empire and that of the republic of Florence, the outburst of patriotism which will render forever memorable the epoch of the Communes, strikes the eye, like a light flashing across a darkness deepened by the political passions of the succeeding age, in which, if the virtues that flow from fruitful emulation impart a glory to the cities of Italy, to the benefit of the peninsula and the world, in arts, commerce, and industry, as well as in science and letters;



yet, on the other hand, the vices to which it gave birth by its aberrations, degraded its conduct, darkening the love of glory by unbridled ambitions, the sentiment of liberty by continual unrest, and its own independence by the oppression of others. In this uncurbed municipalism of the Italian Middle Ages, disinterested love of a common country, imprisoned in the municipality or stowed away in some noble individuality, disappears often as a general phenomenon. Envy, covetousness, revenge, and triumphant treachery form a sort of moral chaos, a consoling contrast to which will one day be formed by the new feelings of the Italian peoples, as they crowd to the banners of Victor Emmanuel and Garibaldi, to form a single nation, free and independent.

To be sure, the individualistic and collectivist principles are still, in the legislative and administrative vicissitudes of the new kingdom, looking for their best form of harmonization, and in order to combat the ancient defects, and especially jealousy and envy, there are needed the sagacious and incessant efforts of an enlightened and patriotic government; but already the progress in the way of good is visible and comforting. Those populations of central Italy which the diplomacy of the first half of this century represented as altogether undisciplined and undeserving of liberty, take their part, like the rest, without resistance, in the sacrifices imposed by the levy, and in the heavy weight of taxation demanded by the needs of a young state which exerts itself to keep pace with its elders in organization and development.

And it would be nothing less than unjust to judge of the political honesty of the Italian people from the record of those times in which faithlessness to sworn compacts, smart practice and means suggested by astuteness and hypocrisy, dressed up under the pompous title of reasons of state, were common to weak, divided Italy with the most united and powerful monarchies. A famous name, and an expression of political and moral significance derived from it,—Machiavelli and Machiavellianism,—have been frequently adduced as designating the political consciousness of the Italians. We neither intend, nor are we able, to discuss at length the question, already set-

tled by historical criticism, in regard to the truth and falsehood of the judgment which represents Machiavelli as the theorist of political immorality. At present, the most impartial critics have made it evident that he does not confound honesty with its opposite, but that, despairing, in times of great corruption, of securing the greatness of his country through virtue alone, he has shown what force can do in the way of restoring to health a social body enfeebled and incapable of rising again in any other way. He has not hesitated to appeal to the cunning of the fox and the violence of the lion, or to embody them in a type of prince whose irresistible will should overcome every obstacle, and render his country united and feared. The society of his time was not such as to inspire him with confidence in the good: a vein of pessimism finds its way into the writings of this profound observer of characters and states, who sees round about him nothing but weakness and impotence, and who aims, above everything, to elevate character once more. Moreover, what is well founded in the charges made by the moralists against Machiavelli, and what is true in Machiavellianism to the discredit of the Italians, is largely counterbalanced by the writings of Paul Paruta, who, reuniting politics and morals which the Florentine secretary had separated, rejects the idea of an art of government devoid of scruples. It is certainly true that the politics of Machiavelli has none; but is not the same thing true of the politics of the states of all times? In spite of the protests of the moral sense, a cunning diplomacy continued to prevail in international relations, until public opinion, supported by science, compelled governments to recognize the duties which limit the right of war and peace between nations, and rendered the violation of them more rare.

Moreover, despite the darkness of his times and his empiricism, Machiavelli did not deny the possibility of virtue, and, if he threw doubt on its efficacy, *his* glorification of force, in contradistinction to that of Hobbes and Spinoza, had for its motive love of country, and for its end the acquisition of independence. He too aspired to an ideal, sometimes to that of a republic after the Roman fashion, sometimes to an absolute

monarchy, and his writings clearly prove that the ideal, without the counterpoise of the moral consciousness, leads finally to the application of the sophistical maxim that "the end justifies the means."

V.

The slur of disloyalty has been unjustly attached to the Italian character in political as well as scientific matters, on the bases of single facts generalized and interpreted with partiality. The Italian philosophers of the Renaissance have been accused of hypocrisy, because at the end of their least orthodox and most audacious writings they declared themselves ready to submit in all things to the authority of the Church. Must the use of the conventional formula, not in all cases devoid of sincerity, prevent us from recognizing their profound love of truth, and the sacrifice of freedom and of even life, which the most famous of them made for its sake? In the martyrology of science, is the place occupied by Italian thinkers so small? Whether theocratic or political, it is the despotism which clips the wings of thought that is responsible for the artifices to which the free spirit resorts when it finds itself stripped of all other weapons in the presence of overwhelming force. Even Jesuitry has flourished in Italy, caressed by the despots; even it has contributed to confuse the moral consciousness by multiplying superstitious practices, and attributing to external forms the importance which belongs only to feelings and to the idea. Shall, therefore, the native country of Gioberti be accused of Jesuitry, a plant of another soil? It is, however, only too true that the fatal influence of the followers of Loyola, finding its way into politics through the channel of religion, and combining the two into a hybrid compound, has greatly contributed to the ambition of the priesthood, and has bolstered up the claim which it makes to unite in itself the two authorities, by which, according to Dante, "it befouled itself and its burden," and to which, according to Machiavelli, we Italians owe the decay of religious faith.

We do not deny it: the multiplicity and minuteness of

religious observances, and especially the exaggeration of trapping and poms in worship, for which the Jesuits are generally held responsible, would not have found favor so readily among the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic races as it did among the Spanish and Italian, which are so much less inclined to a subjective life, and so much more immersed in the external and the sensible. In this JOURNAL,\* Professor Barzellotti has admirably shown the variety of influence exerted on the development of Christianity and its modes of worship by the natural character of the peoples that have embraced it. The essentially artistic spirit of the Italians showed opposition to the Iconoclasts from the first moment of their existence, nor did it ever sunder its religious feeling from the poetic faculty which represents the objects of it in images and other symbols. And this was a great piece of good fortune, not only for Italy, but also for those very nations among whom, at the advent of the Reformation, the worship of images was abolished; for otherwise they would have been left without the chief masterpieces of religious painting and sculpture. How, indeed, would they have been possible with any other direction of the mystic faculty? If even the artists of Germany were able, on their canvas, to represent the marriage of the human and the divine, and in Holbein to emulate the genius of Raphael, this, after all, was the result of the common direction given to Catholic worship in the country which cradled modern art. At the same time, the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic spirit, with a mysticism more spiritual than ours, rebelled against the excess of the representative element, from which we were not able to defend ourselves, and by which, unquestionably, superstition was fostered among the masses of people, under an ecclesiastical government, which was perhaps more anxious to discipline them than to purify their piety. It is useless to blink the fact: the substitution of the external for the eternal in the acts and objects of worship could not, where it took place, be uncon-

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\* July, 1894, vol. iv. p. 445; cf. also his article in *Nuova Antologia*, June 16-July 1, 1891.

nected with the sensuous tendencies of our people; and we are not sufficiently excused by the fact that our aspirations after purification of worship, and our by no means infrequent attempts at religious reform encountered in the Church, enthroned in the heart of the peninsula and supported by brute force, insuperable obstacles; the truth being that the history of the papacy is, in too large measure, our history. Perhaps the fairest thing that can be said in favor of our ethical character in this matter is that, if the internal feeling of the divine and the holy did not among us succeed in emancipating itself from symbols, as it did among other nations; if we have been forced, in our outward worship, to put up with the effects of our native tendencies; yet, at least in other parts of the religious institution, the practical, moderate good sense of our people has supplied us with a moral substitute. We refer to the Italian founders of religious orders and to the theory of cases of conscience. Indeed, from Cassiodorus and St. Benedict down to Antonio Rosmini, the religious orders founded by Italians have preserved a certain moderation in the practices of mysticism sanctioned by their rule, and, above all, they have tried to combine them with science and social utility. The Trappists, with their hideous rule, certainly did not originate here; whereas the character of the Theatines and the Oratorians, two of the most noteworthy orders having their origin in Italy, bear the mark of the temperate mysticism of Gaetano Thiene and Filippo Neri.\* And as to casuistry, although it has a history in Italy extending from St. Thomas to Alfonso de' Liguori, we find in it no Escobars or Sanchezes such as called forth the sarcasms of the author of the "*Lettres Provinciales*."

Let us now sum up our thoughts on the Italian moral character,—of course within the limits of the philosophic consciousness as it appears in the writings of our principal

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\* The name of Filippo Neri is sufficiently well known. Of Gaetano Thiene, we will merely say that, along with the celebrated Gaspare Contarini, Jacopo Sadoletto, Giovanni Dati, and other men distinguished for knowledge and virtue, he founded in Rome, under Leo X., the Society of Divine Love, in order to reform the manners of the paganized city.

moralists and political writers:—Yes, in the southern nature of the Italians, feeling and imagination are more potent than in that of the northern peoples. In the expression of our moral life, and in its relation to civil and religious life, it often happens that, overcoming reflection and will, they command instead of obey. Emotion and fancy have sometimes roused in the Italian mind the loftiest ideals, and rendered it capable of great things. There is no sphere of human activity but furnishes proofs of this, if we consider the total life of the nation, or, better still, that of the states into which it was so long broken up. In the struggle for the independence of the Communes, in the renaissance of culture, in the Franciscan movement, in all the changes that were effected in that age with a view to liberty and national unity, there appears a solidarity of mind and a common aspiration towards a lofty end, whether scientific, artistic, religious, or political. The histories of Florence, Venice, Piedmont, and Genoa furnish splendid examples not only of individual virtue, but also of heroisms on the part of whole peoples; and at critical moments, when liberty was at stake, there was no lack of magnanimous efforts in Sicily and Naples. But wonderful as such enthusiasm is, its results are not lasting; when the heat of passion has cooled down, when the end is reached or missed, the spirit readily sinks back into discouragement and inertia, if not sustained and upheld by force of will; and, what is a greater misfortune still, the common aspirations after the Good give way to indifference, or, worse, to individual interests and the calculations of selfishness.

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